

AUTHENTICATION METHOD

TECHNICAL FIELD

5 The present invention generally relates to security in communication systems and in particular to password-based authentication in group networks.

BACKGROUND

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In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in dynamical group networks referred to as ad-hoc networks, which basically can form wherever two or more nodes using the same means to communicate are present. Every node in the network can act as a router forwarding packets for other nodes
15 or there is only broadcast communication. Hence, ad hoc networks do not need a centralized control organ and can very quickly be formed, merged together and partitioned into separate networks on the fly, without relying on a fixed infrastructure. An advantageous feature of such networks is that comparatively small and simple devices can be used as nodes, including
20 Personal Digital Assistants (PDA), laptops and cellular phones. Wireless communication is generally used to interconnect at least some devices, but the network may also include static and wired nodes.

Ad hoc networks can comprise Local Area Networks (LAN), such as
25 workstations in the same building interconnected to share the resources of a server, as well as group networks managed by individual persons, commonly referred to as Personal Area Networks (PAN). A PAN is generally associated with a small coverage and consists of networked personal devices in close vicinity of the owner. Typical PAN nodes are PDAs, printers, personal
30 computers, digital cameras, mobile phones and MP3 players, but the network may also include household appliances such as refrigerators and vacuum cleaners. Ad hoc communication in a PAN can use various technologies. The Bluetooth technology, for example, may often be an

appropriate choice for wireless communication between mobile devices in a PAN.

Interconnecting personal devices into group networks leads to some obvious
5 advantages. Nevertheless, it lies in the nature of such networks that they are
very vulnerable to attacks by unauthorized intruders. A main reason for this
is that the communication often uses radio frequencies and is therefore easy
to eavesdrop on. Moreover, portable devices are naturally easier to steal.
Finally, if countermeasures are not taken, the ad-hoc nature implies a high
10 risk of a rogue device entering the network. The consequences may for
instance be devastating if a malicious intruder is passed as a member of the
group and allowed to send instructions to the other group members and get
access to secret information stored therein. Well-functioning security
solutions are hence crucial for group networks like PANs to become widely
15 spread in the future. In particular, there is a need for secure mechanisms for
excluding non-trusted group members, e.g. by revoking the privileges of
stolen devices.

In a PAN, a normal everyday user is the manager of the group and user
20 convenience is highly prioritized. A most desirable feature of PAN security
mechanisms, such as mechanisms for user authentication and for
revocation of group members, is therefore that they are user-friendly,
preferably based on simple user passwords.

25 According to a well-known prior-art method for password-based authentication
towards a device, the "hash value" of the password is stored in the
device. When a password is input to the device, the corresponding hash
value is determined. The device then compares this hash value with the
locally stored value, which are to be identical if the input password is
30 correct. Typically, the user immediately gets some kind of indication of
whether the authentication succeeded.

The described method can be applied onto a group network, generally using one common password for all group members in order to achieve simple network management. However, this solution is associated with severe drawbacks, since anyone hacking a group member is able to retrieve the locally stored hash value and use it to guess and verify the correct password. Since passwords tend to be rather short, e.g. four digits/characters, it is often feasible to try all possible passwords in an automated attack. This illustrates a major problem of conventional password-based mechanisms, i.e. that the password generally can be "reverse-engineered" by means of the information stored in a stolen device.

Accordingly, the authentication mechanisms of conventional telecommunication systems are far from satisfactory and there is a considerable need for an improved procedure for password-based authentication of group members.

SUMMARY

A general object of the present invention is to provide an improved security solution for group networks. A specific object is to provide an improved mechanism for password-based authentication of group members. Another object is to achieve secure revocation of group members.

These objects are achieved in accordance with the attached claims.

Briefly, a new way of performing password-based authentication of devices in group networks, such as ad hoc networks and PANs, is proposed. Each group member is provided with an authentication token, which is created by means of the password but nevertheless cannot be used to recreate the password nor to verify that a password guess is correct. This can for example be achieved by using a bijective locking function to which a common secret and a one-way function of the password are input. The authentication involves two devices, a first device to which the password is input and a

second device towards which the authentication occurs. The first device determines a check token for the second based on the identity of that device, the password and its own authentication token. This check token is transferred to the second device, where it is compared with the authentication token thereof. If these tokens match, the input password is correct and the authentication succeeds.

Preferably, the password as well as all significant parameters generated in the process except the authentication token of each device are erased after usage. In this way, the information contained in one device does not permit retrieval of the password, which results in a high level of security. Another major advantage offered by the invention is that the password only has to be temporary exposed at one single device during an authentication event.

A preferred embodiment of the invention includes update of a device and can be used, among other things, for revocation of a non-trusted device or for changing the password. It is even possible to exclude a group member without changing the password, which is often convenient for the user. Other embodiments of the invention achieve secure delegation of update rights as well as mutual (bilateral) authentication between group members. Furthermore, policies limiting the number or frequency of authentication attempts are preferably implemented, in particular if the authentication response is communicated back to the user.

According to other aspects of the invention a communication system and a device with means for password-based authentication, as well as a computer program product for password-based authentication are provided.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention, together with further objects and advantages thereof, is best understood by reference to the following description and the accompanying
5 drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 is a schematic view of an exemplary group network in which the present invention can be used;

10 Fig. 2 is a schematic view of the basic components of a group network according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3 illustrates authentication towards a group member according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention;

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Fig. 4 illustrates authentication and update according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

20 Fig. 5 illustrates authentication and update in a group network according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 6 is a flow chart of a preferred embodiment of the authentication method according to the present invention;

25 Fig. 7 illustrates an initial set-up procedure for forming a group network according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 8 illustrates addition of a new member to a group network according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention; and

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Fig. 9 illustrates delegation of update rights in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Throughout the drawings the same reference numbers are used for similar or corresponding elements.

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Fig. 1 is a schematic view of an exemplary group network in which the present invention can be used. A rather small network 100 is shown, consisting of a PDA 12-1, a laptop 12-2 and a cell phone 12-3, forming a so-called Wireless Personal Area Network (WPAN). Other personal devices may
10 be included in the PAN, such as printers, MP3-players, digital cameras and various household appliances (refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, etc). In fact, the invention is not limited to PANs, but can be used in any kind of group network including other groups connected in an ad hoc fashion. A typical feature of such an ad hoc network is that some devices are part of the
15 network only during a communication session or while in close proximity to the rest of the network.

The group network in accordance with the invention includes at least two nodes associated with a common password, e.g. a PIN-code. The group is
20 generally managed by a single user, but there may be cases where two or more users, e.g. members of the same household, share a password. The nodes can be interconnected by wireless connections as in Fig. 1, e.g. using Bluetooth or Infrared technology, or cable connections and combined wireless/wired networks are common.

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Fig. 2 is a schematic view of the basic components of an exemplary group network in accordance with the invention. A network composed of four devices/units 22 with separate identities ID_i , $i=1,...,4$, and handled by a user 23 is illustrated. Each device has been provided with an identical group key
30 K_g for secure communication within the group, using well-known conventional authentication techniques. This key is primarily intended to be used when the devices communicate with a minimum of user-interaction, e.g. when they need to automatically connect to each other. By means of K_g the devices can verify that they belong to the same group network. There

may also be individual key pairs K_{ij} (not shown), $i=1,...,4$ and $j=1,...,4$, to enable secure communication between two specific members of the group. The keys K_G and K_{ij} are typically installed in the devices during set-up/initial handshake procedures. The user has a password P for managing the group network. All devices of the group are thus associated with the same password P .

Besides authentication occurring "automatically" between devices, the user in some cases need to authenticate himself to a particular device. In order to achieve password-based user authentication in accordance with the invention, each device in the group has a unique authentication token R_i ($i=1,...,4$ in Fig 2). Typically, each authentication token R_i is stored in the corresponding device, preferably tamper-resistantly protected, but there may also be cases where one or more R_i are externally stored, for example at a secure server from which they are retrieved when needed for authentication purposes. The authentication tokens are assigned such that no individual authentication token alone permits retrieval of the password nor provides means to verify that a guessed password is correct. Preferably, the authentication token should not reveal any information on the password at all. R_i is thus a one-way function of the password P and preferably also depends on a token secret S , which is a basic group key/secret individually uncorrelated both with the password P and with the authentication token R_i . Each authentication token R_i is then created from the same token secret S and the password P in a way that will be described later with reference to Figs. 7 and 8. Now a brief explanation of the relationship between R_i , S and P according to a preferred embodiment of the invention follows.

The authentication token R_i ($i=1,2,...,n$ for a group of n devices) is the result of a locking function E of H_i and the token secret S :

$$R_i = E(H_i, S)$$

H_i is in turn given by the expression:

$$H_i = f(ID_i \parallel P)$$

i.e. a one-way function f of the password P and of the respective device identity ID_i . \parallel indicates string concatenation.

The locking function E is a bijective function in the second input with an inverse function denoted D ($D = E^{-1}$), which implies that the token secret S may be unlocked through:

$$S = D(H_i, R_i).$$

The described relationships can be used for secure password-based authentication in accordance with the present invention.

Password-based authentication

Fig. 3 illustrates authentication towards a group member according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention. The basic idea of the invention relies on using one device in the group for authentication towards one or more other group members. In the illustrated example, the user wishes to perform actions towards device j , such as sending revocation instructions, for which his explicit authorization needs to be verified. The user chooses another member of the group network, device i , to handle the authentication and inputs a password P at this device. Device i then uses a combination of its own authentication token R_i and the password to unlock the token secret S according to the following steps:

i) $H_i = f(ID_i \parallel P)$

ii) $S = D(H_i, R_i)$

Thereafter, device i uses S and P to create a check token M_j for device j :

iii) $H_j = f(ID_j \parallel P)$

iv) $M_j = E(H_j, S)$

The check token M_j represents the authentication token that should be available at device j if the user has input the correct password. M_j is sent to device j , preferably protected by means of the key pair K_{ij} , where it is compared with the actual authentication token R_j of device j . If M_j equals R_j

the authentication is successfully completed and the user can be trusted by device j . Should, on the other hand, M_j be different from R_j , the authentication fails and device j does not listen to instructions from device i that require explicit user authorization. It could, however, still accept other types of messages. In some cases, it may be appropriate to let device j communicate the result of the authentication comparison to device i by sending an authentication response message 34, as indicated by the dashed arrow in Fig. 3.

- 10 The described procedure may with advantage be used for authentication with one device i towards several devices in the group, or even all other group members. The steps iii and iv above are then repeated for each device j ($j=1, \dots, n$ and $j \neq i$).
- 15 The only strict requirement on the assigning device i is that it must have an input unit or the like, e.g. a keyboard, for receiving the password. Since configuration actions could be called for anytime and anywhere, they should preferably be possible to invoke from any device belonging to the group. In a preferred embodiment of the invention each group member is therefore
- 20 provided with a simple input unit, making it capable of acting as authenticator like device i above.

The password P and S should preferably be erased as soon as possible after usage thereof, whereby they are only temporary exposed at device i . In a most preferred embodiment, all parameters participating in the authentication procedure, including P , S and intermediates like H_i , are deleted when no longer needed, except the respective authentication tokens R_i .

- 30 The password-based authentication of the invention results in some major advantages. The password only needs to be exposed at one device in the group during the authentication procedure. This implies a considerably improved password management and security compared to conventional

authentication where the password is exposed at each unit. Moreover, the information of a single group member, i.e. its authentication token, does not allow retrieval or brute force search of the password. This means that it is not possible to obtain the password from a single stolen device by using the information therein. Neither can one device be used to "fool" another device without knowledge of the password.

Authentication and update

The purpose of the authentication is generally to send update information, such as revocation information or a new password, to one or several group members. In such a case, an updating procedure is integrated into the authentication procedure in a way illustrated by Figs. 4 and 5.

Fig. 4 illustrates authentication towards and update of a device j 42-2 with a device i 42-1 according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. As before, the user 43 enters the password P of the group network at device i. If the user wants to change the password and/or exclude one or several devices from the group, a new password P' and/or revocation information 45, e.g. a list of non-trusted devices, are also input to device i. The token secret S is determined at device i through steps i and ii above. However, in this case some additional preparations are needed before the actual authentication and updating phases. First, a new token secret S' is created, preferably by conventional random value generating means. S' and P' are then used at device i to create a new authentication token R_i' for itself according to:

$$v) \quad H_i' = f(ID_i \parallel P')$$

$$vi) \quad R_i' = E(H_i', S')$$

The authentication token R_i stored in device i (or externally) is replaced with the new authentication token R_i'.

The check token M_j for the authentication is created according to steps iii and iv above but this time a new authentication token R_j' for device j is determined as well:

$$\text{vii) } H_j' = f(ID_j \parallel P')$$

5 $\text{viii) } R_j' = E(H_j', S')$

Thereafter, the check token M_j is transferred from device i to device j , where the authentication comparison between M_j and R_j is performed in the above-described way. The authentication response message 44 sent from device j in
10 Fig. 4 to indicate the result of the authentication is optional. Only if the tokens match and the authentication thus is successful, device j agrees on being updated by device i . In such a case, update information can be successfully transferred to device j . The key par K_{ij} or another a security mechanism is preferably employed also for this transfer of information.

15 The update information for device j comprises the new authentication token R_j' and possibly also revocation information and/or a new group key K_g' . The revocation information is preferably protected and may include a revocation list containing the devices to be excluded or an equivalent group-defining list of the devices still being part of the group. Through such a list the device j
20 can be instructed to ignore a non-trusted device. Moreover, the list can be especially useful during a period of time in the update when some trusted devices have not yet been updated with the new group key K_g' , and the fact that a device can prove possession of a particular group key is thus not sufficient to distinguish between trusted and non-trusted devices. The new
25 group key K_g' is typically included in the update information if the update is related to group-defining measures, such as revocation.

The described procedure may with advantage be used in order to change the password P , exclude a non-trusted member from the group, or achieve both
30 a password change and revocation at the same time. If the user does not wish to change the password, P' is equal to P in the above equations. The fact that the invention enables revocation of a device without changing the password constitutes another advantageous feature thereof. The user is

spared the trouble of having to invent and remember a new password every time the group network is redefined, which simplifies the management of the group.

5 Fig. 5 visualizes authentication and update in a group network according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention. In the illustrated example, the group manager 53 uses the device 52-2 with identity ID₂ for authentication and update towards the other devices 52-1, 52-3, 52-4 by means of the above-described mechanism. The passwords P, P' and revocation information
10 55 are thus entered at device 52-2, which repeats the steps iii, iv, vii and viii for each device j (j=1, 3, 4) to obtain the respective check tokens and update information. The new password P' is like the previous password P only exposed at device 52-2 and together with all parameters except the new authentication tokens R_i' (i=1, 2, 3, 4) preferably deleted immediately after
15 usage.

Generally, the update procedure is initiated by the group manager in the above-described way. Solutions where one device in the group network initiates update by sending a request to another device also lie within the
20 scope of the invention. In one embodiment, a unit that is switched-on after an inactive period for example automatically asks for appropriate update information from at least two other units.

Fig. 6 is a flow chart of a preferred embodiment of the authentication method
25 according to the invention with integrated update. Initially, all units in the group network are provided with a respective authentication token in step S1. The assignment of authentication tokens involves using the password P of the group but this is accomplished such that no individual authentication token alone can be used to recreate the password. When the group members
30 have received their authentication tokens in this assigning phase, the actual authentication phase can be initiated by entering the password at a first unit chosen by the user. The first unit determines a check token for a second unit, more specifically the unit towards which authentication is needed, in

step S2. The check token is securely transferred to the second unit, where it is compared with the authentication token assigned to this unit (step S3). The requirement for a successful authentication is that these tokens match completely. Should this not be the case, the authentication fails (step S4) and the second unit will not trust the manager of the first unit.

Identical tokens, on the other hand, means that the input password is successfully verified. In this case, the second unit accepts being updated by the first unit. Update information, including a new authentication token for the second unit, is then created at the first unit in step S5. In step S6, the generated update information is transferred to the second unit, possibly together with update information that is forwarded unchanged by the first unit. This transfer could be initiated in response to an authentication response message sent from the second unit. Alternatively, step S5 and possibly also S6 is performed at an earlier stage before the comparison in step S3. Step S5 can for example be simultaneous with the check token determination in step S2. Either way, a successful authentication comparison is always required for the second unit to accept being updated by the first unit. In a final step S7, all parameters used in the authentication process but the authentication tokens are erased from the group network, including the password.

The described mechanism for password-based authentication can be realized as a computer program product implemented in the group network. The computer program product could for example be an executable software module comprising program means for performing the steps of Fig. 6.

The main principles of the invention have now been explained, and the following paragraphs will be devoted to specific features and embodiments thereof.

Assigning authentication tokens

Before the actual authentication phase, authentication tokens R_i ($i=1,2,\dots,n$ for a group of n devices) have to be assigned to all devices in the group.

5 In an initial set-up phase, for instance when a new group network is formed, the authentication tokens R_i , and preferably also the group key K_G , are spread throughout the system. Referring to Fig. 7, one of the devices 72-1 is hereby selected to act as an "assigning device", creating its own authentication token as well as the authentication tokens for all other
10 devices 72-2, 72-3. The assigning procedure normally starts when the user 73 enters the password P to the assigning device 72-1. This device generates a token secret S for the group, preferably using a random value generating function. For each other device 72-2, 72-3, device 72-1 then calculates an authentication token according to the following steps ($j=2,3$):

- 15 ix) $H_j = f(ID_j \parallel P)$
x) $R_j = E(H_j, S)$

In a preferred embodiment, the authentication tokens R_2 , R_3 are sent to the corresponding devices over secure connections, such as by using the pair
20 keys $K_{1,2}$, $K_{1,3}$, and tamper-resistantly stored therein. However, in some cases these keys $K_{i,j}$ are not available at the initial set up. Then, the devices preferably communicate by wire, Infrared or short-range wireless links during the initial phase to make eavesdropping difficult. This initial phase could include establishment of said keys. Alternatively, keys are manually
25 entered to devices by the user/administrator.

When adding a new device to an already existing group network, a similar assigning procedure may be used, as illustrated in Fig. 8. Assume that the user 83 wants to add a new device 82-4 to the group network. He then
30 inputs the password P to another device 82-2, which is already a member of the group and associated with an authentication token R_2 . This authentication token R_2 is together with P and ID_2 used to unlock S and calculate R_4 at device 82-2 according to the following steps ($i=2, j=4$):

$$\text{x i) } H_i = f (ID_i \parallel P)$$

$$\text{x ii) } S = D (H_i, R_i)$$

$$\text{x iii) } H_j = f (ID_j \parallel P)$$

$$\text{x iv) } R_j = E (H_j, S)$$

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R₄ is with advantage securely sent from device 82-2 to device 82-4 using the key pair K_{2,4}. It should be emphasized that the user can select any suitable device 82-1, 82-2, 82-3 in the group to assign an authentication token for a new device. In particular, this assigning device 82-2 does *not* have to be
10 identical to the assigning device (72-1 in Fig. 7) performing the initial authentication token spreading.

Again, all parameters participating in the assigning procedure except the authentication tokens are preferably erased after usage.

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The locking function E

The locking function E used to determine the authentication tokens R_i can be implemented in different ways in accordance with the invention. However, in order to retrieve S in the above-described assigning and authentication
20 phases, E must be bijective in the second input, i.e. possible to convert into the inverse “unlocking” function D.

In a preferred embodiment the locking function E is a symmetric block encryption function, such as a well-known prior-art function like DES, AES,
25 Blowfish or a simple bitwise XOR. Other embodiments can be based on asymmetric functions instead, for example ElGamal encryption:

$$\begin{cases} E(x, y) = g^x y \bmod p \\ D(x, y) = g^{-x} y \bmod p \end{cases}$$

where p is an appropriate prime number and g is a generator of a large subgroup of Z_p^* . More information on the mentioned encryption functions as well
30 as on general cryptography can for instance be found in “Handbook of Applied Cryptography” by A.J. Menezes, P.C. van Oorschot and S.C. Vanstone, CRC Press.

The basic property exploited in the locking function is that for each possible password P' there exists an S' which, if P' is correct, would have produced the authentication token R_i . Hence, it is not possible to use R_i as a “witness” for a correctly guessed password. More precisely, given a candidate P' , it can easily be verified that the value $S' = D(f(ID_i \parallel P'), R_i)$ has this property, since $E(f(ID_i \parallel P'), S') = R_i$.

Another approach, generalizing the above methods, is to use a new interpolation method referred to as password-based secret sharing. The locking function is then set as

$$E(x, S) = ax + S \quad (a \neq 0)$$

which corresponds to straight lines with slope a and intercepts S . Still referring to the line interpretation of the locking function, the basic idea is to share the secret to the line (i.e. to E) between the respective device and the user in the sense that each possesses a vital piece of information needed for determination thereof. Since a straight line is uniquely determined by two points, the secret sharing can be achieved by providing information of one point on the line in the device (through R_i), whereas the user password P is needed to obtain the other point.

The outlined password-based secret sharing may be accomplished in the following way. $E(H_i, S)$ is created for each i and the respective authentication tokens R_i are set as:

$$R_i = \{ x, E(x, S), E(H_i, S) \} \quad (x \neq H_i)$$

where x is a random value equal for all R_i in the group. In this case, R_i contains both coordinates $(x, E(x, S))$ of one point on the “line” E but only one coordinate $(E(H_i, S))$ of the other point. The remaining coordinate (H_i) can only be determined by entering the password P at device i , since it is by definition a one-way function of P :

$$H_i = f(ID_i \parallel P)$$

The unlocking is in this example achieved through interpolation with the decryption function D defined as:

$$D(H_i, R_i) = E(x, S) - x \cdot \frac{E(x, S) - E(H_i, S)}{x - H_i}$$

By using the above equation, the token secret S can be retrieved provided that P (and thus H_i) is known.

5 Delegation of update rights

If a user starts performing an update with a certain device and for some reason cannot continue although there are still devices left to update, it may be appropriate to apply a delegation scheme in accordance with another embodiment of the invention. The user then selects one or more group
10 members that are authorized to update the remaining devices. This means that the update occurs via an intermediate device that has received update rights from the original updating device to which the password P was input.

Fig. 9 schematically illustrates an exemplary embodiment of the invention
15 where update rights are delegated from device i 92-1 to two intermediate devices q1 and q2 92-2, 92-3. Device i creates the check token M_j and the new authentication token R_j' for a non-updated device j 92-4 in accordance with steps iii, iv, vii and viii above. It sends M_j and update information comprising R_j' to both intermediate devices q1 and q2. In the illustrated
20 example, device q2 has encountered the non-updated device j and forwards the update information to this device after a successful authentication.

In order to increase the possibility of a quick and reliable update of the remaining devices, it may thus be appropriate to delegate equivalent update
25 rights to several intermediate devices. The device that first is able to communicate with a specific non-updated device, performs the update thereof. The scenario that another update-authorized device later encounters this already updated device, can be handled in different ways. One possibility is that an updated device is instructed to ignore multiple update
30 attempts. Another is that the update-authorized device recognizes that there has already been an update and that no further action is needed. Means for achieving this will be described in the following. A final way of dealing with

multiple update attempts would be to simply allow them. This leads to unnecessary signaling in the network but will generally not cause any significant problems.

5 In the proposed delegation scheme the update information is still created at the original updating device (92-1 in Fig. 9) although at least a portion thereof is transferred via the intermediate device(s). Consequently, the password P still only needs to be exposed at one group member. This constitutes yet another advantageous feature of the invention, and enables
10 embodiments where the delegation of update rights includes delegation of rights to further delegate the update rights. In other words, the update can occur through two or more intermediate devices, resulting in a chain of group members participating in the updating process. Irrespective of the number of intermediate devices, the password P is restricted to the first
15 device and in this regard the secure password management of the invention is maintained.

Irrespective of whether the delegation involves a single intermediate device or several devices, the update rights may with advantage be accompanied by a
20 time stamp in accordance with a further embodiment of the invention. The time stamp facilitates determining of whether the update information is still valid at the point of time when the intermediate device actually encounters one of the devices concerned by the update rights. Preferably, the time stamp comprises a generation identity ID_G, indicating to which update generation
25 the update information belongs. For comparison purposes, the devices in the group also have ID_G parameters. During an ongoing update process some devices could for instance be updated with a new generation identity ID_G', while others are still associated with the previous ID_G. The generation identities ID_G of the devices are generally closely related to and updated at
30 the same time as the group key K_G.

By means of the time stamp, a device q encountering a device j for which it has update information can determine if an update is still of interest by

checking whether the update information belongs to a later generation than the current generation identity ID_G of device j. By keeping track of different update events in the described manner, delayed update events can be recognized and ignored.

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Preferably, the delegation of update rights involves an active choice by the user regarding which group members that should have the right to perform update actions, as described above. However, the invention also covers solutions where the original updating device automatically initiates the delegation in response to a failed or interrupted update process.

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Authentication response message and update policies

In accordance with the basic principles of the invention, a user enters a password to a device that verifies it with another device. The first device does not know the outcome of the authentication and nor does the user. In some cases an accept/reject signal may be desired and in accordance with some embodiments of the invention an authentication response message (34; 44; 94 of Figs. 3, 4 and 9) is therefore sent back to the first device to indicate the authentication result. In case of failure it can also be appropriate to generate an error audit log message.

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The advantage of the authentication response message is that it makes it possible for the user to see whether he entered the correct password. However, sending a response message also introduces a problem, since it practically immediately reveals if a password tried by an attacker at a stolen device is correct or not. It would thus be possible for the attacker to try many different passwords by repeatedly sending information to several non-updates devices. To avoid this, policies regulating the authentication are preferably implemented in some or all devices in the group network. These policies may for instance impose a limit on the number on password attempts. Each device could e.g. be instructed to only accept three subsequent password attempts.

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There may also be policies focusing on the frequency of the password attempts, such that the response message displayed to the user is exponentially delayed as the number of password attempts increases. An attacker then has to wait longer and longer for the result of each password attempt, making it practically impossible to carry through with the large number of attempts that statistically would be needed to find the correct password. Such delay policies are preferably combined with a limit on the number of password attempts but could also be separately applied.

- 10 According to other embodiments of the invention, an alarm signal for the user is generated if a predetermined number of password attempts is exceeded. The alarm signal is created at the attacked unit and preferably sent to one or several other group members as soon as appropriate communication paths can be established. When the alarm message reaches
15 the group manager he can take appropriate measures, such as initiating a revocation, in response thereto.

Mutual authentication

- Another advantageous feature of the proposed method is that it can be
20 extended to allow two-way authentication, where not only a first device is authenticated towards a second device but the second device is at the same time authenticated towards the first device. By means of this mutual authentication a trust relationship is established between a pair of devices in the group network.

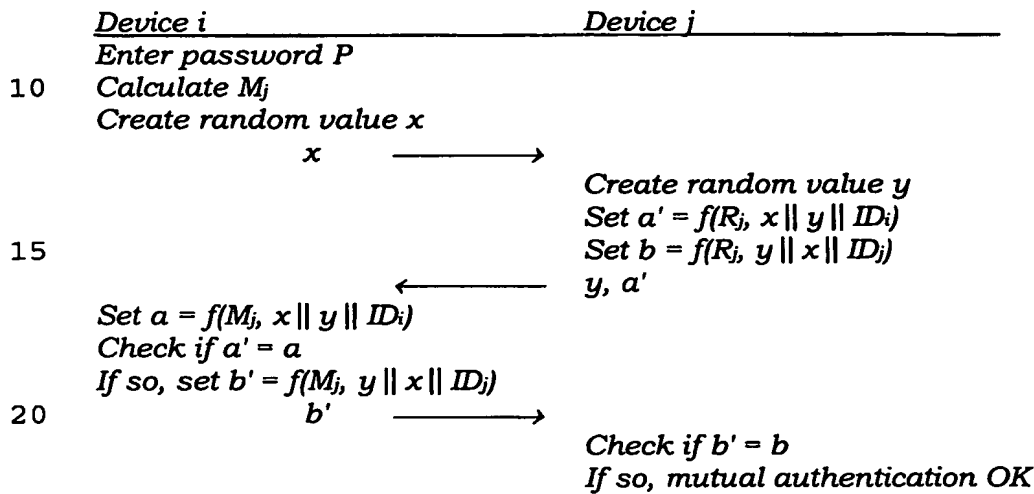
25

- Two exemplary implementations of a mechanism for mutual authentication between a device i and a device j in accordance with the invention are given in Protocol A and B below. Both solutions involves additional security measures to protect the authentication token R_j and involves temporary test
30 secrets that are based on random values generated at the respective unit. This results in authentication comparisons between parameters representing the authentication tokens, i.e. between indirect authentication tokens. The

communication between device i and j below is preferably protected by means of the key pair K_{ij} .

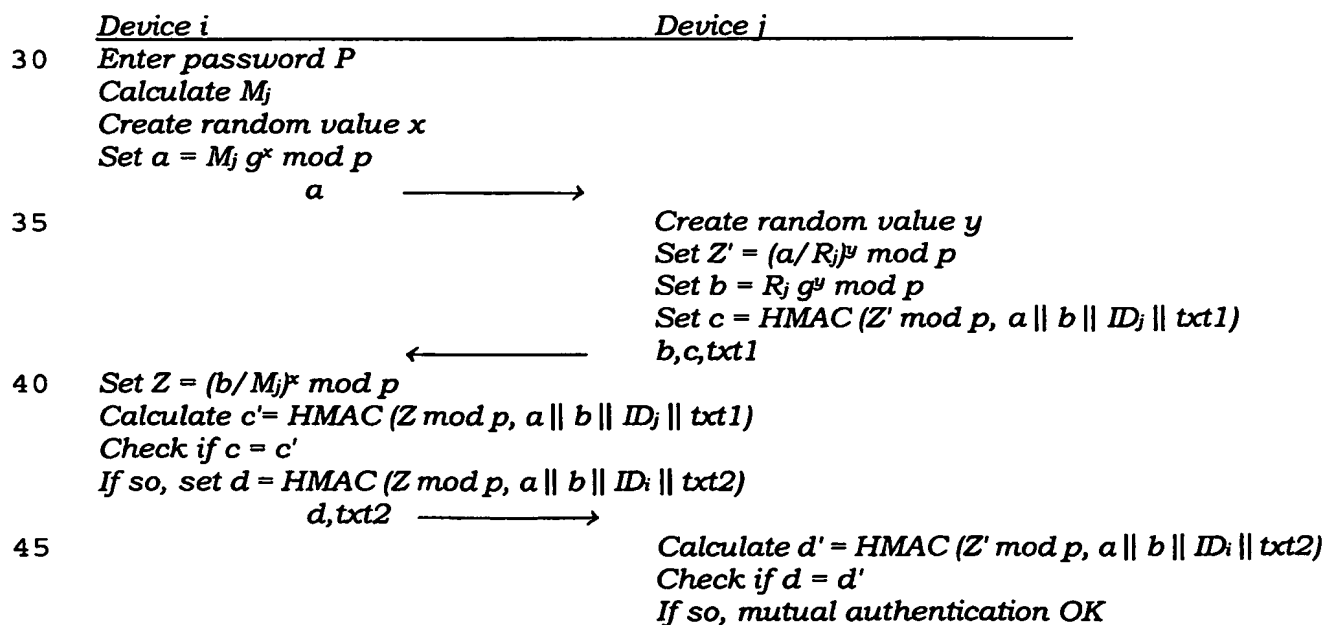
Protocol A

- 5 Define $f(R, z)$ as an appropriate pseudo-random function, e.g. AES with key R and input z , and let \parallel denote concatenation of bit strings.



25 Protocol B

Define p as an appropriate prime number and g as a generator of Z_p and let \parallel denote concatenation of bit strings.



The solution in Protocol A has the advantage of being very straight-forward. Nevertheless, it theoretically leads to a somewhat reduced password security, since extensive guessing might lead to the password. In practice, this normally does not constitute a problem, and in case of concern an encryption encapsulated Protocol A can be used.

In Protocol B, the authentication tokens are hidden through additional security steps. The procedure is based on exchanging a key g^{xy} common for the two devices and determined by one random value from each device, x and y . The key exchange occurs through transfer of the parameters a and b . $txt1$ and $txt2$ are text strings of arbitrary length concatenated with a and b to form the second input parameter of the one-way function HMAC. For further information on HMAC, reference is made to IETF: "HMAC, Keyed-Hashing for Message Authentication" (RFC 2104).

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Critical operations

It may in some cases be appropriate to distinguish between critical operations, for which user authentication is required, and other less important operations in the group network. For this purpose, a preferred embodiment of the invention implements policies defining critical operations at some or all units in the group. One way would be to simply use a look-up table accessed from the units. The policies are stored either at the units or externally.

The critical operations comprise both operations requiring update of some devices in the group, such as revocation, and operations that do not involve information update but still require authentication. The latter typically holds for operations performed in order to access objects or services associated with high security demands, such as opening a safe or retrieving secret information from a server.

Although the invention has been described with reference to specific illustrated embodiments, it should be emphasized that it also covers

equivalents to the disclosed features, as well as modifications and variants obvious to a man skilled in the art. Thus, the scope of the invention is only limited by the enclosed claims.